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PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE

BETWEEN THE

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

AND THE

PREMIERS OF THE SELF-GOVERNING COLONIES,

AT THE

COLONIAL OFFICE, LONDON,

JUNE AND JULY 1897.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.
31st July 1897.



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MR. CHAMBERLAIN TO GOVERNOR-GENERAL THE EARL OF
ABERDEEN (CANADA).*

Downing Street, August 13, 1897.

MY LORD,

In my Despatch of the 28th of January last, conveying to the Premiers [C. 8485, p. 4.] of the self-governing Colonies the invitation to be present at, and take part in the celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of Her Majesty's Accession, I intimated to you the hope of Her Majesty's Government that their presence here might afford a valuable opportunity for the informal discussion of many subjects of great interest to the Empire. I have now the honour to enclose for your information a memorandum showing how that hope was fully realised and giving an account of the business transacted.

Her Majesty's Government desire to put on record their strong sense of the loyal and patriotic spirit which was shown by all the representatives of the Colonies in the course of their discussions.

They are well aware that many of them came here at considerable sacrifice of personal convenience, but they hope that their Colonial colleagues are satisfied that their visit has been productive of great advantage to the Empire, and that the Conferences which have been held have resulted in such a free interchange of views as will have a lasting and beneficial effect in securing a complete mutual understanding between the Colonies and the Mother Country.

I have, &c.,

J. CHAMBERLAIN.

* A similar Despatch was addressed to—

Governor VISCOUNT HAMPDEN, New South Wales.

„ LORD BRASSEY, Victoria.

„ the EARL of RANFURLY, New Zealand.

„ LORD LAMINGTON, Queensland.

„ SIR ALFRED MILNER, Cape of Good Hope.

„ SIR T. F. BUXTON, South Australia.

„ SIR H. H. MURRAY, Newfoundland.

„ VISCOUNT GORMANSTON, Tasmania,

„ SIR G. SMITH, Western Australia, and

„ SIR W. F. HELY-HUTCHINSON, Natal.

MEMORANDUM.

On Thursday, the 24th of June, the Prime Ministers of Canada, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand, Queensland, Cape Colony, South Australia, Newfoundland, Tasmania, Western Australia, and Natal, assembled at the Colonial Office, Downing Street, for the discussion of certain Imperial questions with the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It was decided that the proceedings should be informal and that the general results only should be published. With the view of giving a definite direction to the discussion, the Secretary of State, in opening the proceedings, set forth the subjects which he considered might usefully be discussed, so as to secure an interchange of views upon them, and where they were ripe for a statement of opinion, a definite resolution in regard to them, in the following speech :—

“I have made arrangements for a full shorthand report of all our proceedings, which will be confidential, unless we otherwise desire, but copies, of course, will be furnished to every gentleman for reference, and possibly later on, if we come to any conclusions, we may consider further whether it is desirable or not that any public statement should be made. In the meantime, until we come to a united conclusion upon the subject, the proceedings will be treated as absolutely confidential.

I desire at the outset of these proceedings to offer to you, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, a hearty and cordial welcome. You will have seen in your short visit to this country that all parties, and all classes, are animated by the most affectionate feelings of regard towards our Colonial fellow subjects. I think that you may also feel that the main object of your visit has already been to a great extent accomplished. The great pageant to which you contributed so interesting a feature has shown to this country, to the Colonies, and to all the world, the strength, the power, the resources, and the loyalty of the British Empire. It was, I think we shall all agree, a most remarkable and absolutely unparalleled demonstration of personal loyalty to a Sovereign and of the essential unity of the Empire.

Her Majesty's Government, while very anxious to take this opportunity of an interchange of views with you on many matters of common interest, have carefully avoided suggesting anything in the nature of a formal Conference. We do so, in the first place because we do not wish to detract in any way from the personal character of this visit, and also because we do not desire to take advantage of your presence to force upon you discussions on which you might be unwilling at this moment to enter. On the other hand we are open to consider in the most friendly and the most favourable way any representations which may be made to us by the representatives of the self-governing Colonies, having regard to the present or the future relations between the different parts of the Empire, and in this respect we are in the position of those who desire rather to learn your views than to press ours upon you. I might, I think, upon this sit down and invite your opinions, but it has been suggested to me, and it seems reasonable to suppose, that it might be convenient to you at this, our preliminary meeting, if I were to state as briefly as I can the subjects which appear to us to be most worthy of our joint consideration, and then it will be for you to say whether these subjects, or any of them,

are such as you would like to consider more formally and in detail, in which case I hope we may arrange for subsequent interviews with that object; but to-day I will state for your consideration a list of subjects, and I will ask you to give me your views as to the way in which they should subsequently be dealt with.

POLITICAL RELATIONS.

Now, gentlemen, undoubtedly the greatest, the most important, and at the same time the most difficult of all the subjects which we could consider is the question of the future relations, political and commercial, between the self-governing Colonies and the United Kingdom. I do not think that it is necessary for me to argue at all upon the advantages of such closer union. Strong as is the bond of sentiment, and impossible as it would be to establish any kind of relations unless that bond of sentiment existed, I believe we all feel that it would be desirable to take advantage of it, and to still further tighten the ties which bind us together. In this country, at all events, I may truly say that the idea of federation is in the air. Whether with you it has gone as far, it is for you to say, and it is also for you to consider whether we can give any practical application to the principle. It may well be that the time is hardly ripe for anything definite in this regard. It is quite true that our own constitution and your constitutions have all been the subject of very slow growth and that they are all the stronger because they have been gradually consolidated, and so perhaps with Imperial Federation: if it is ever to be accomplished it will be only after the lapse of a considerable time and only by gradual steps.

And undoubtedly one of those steps to which we must all attach very great importance is the grouping of the Colonies. We rejoice in this country that Canada has already shown the way, with results which everyone has seen have conduced greatly to her strength and to her prosperity. We observe, with the most lively interest, the proceedings which are taking place in Australia with the same view. We know that in South African politics the same idea has bulked very largely in the past, and probably will come to the front again. In regard to all these matters it is not for us to offer advice; it is not for us to press upon you in any shape our interference or our assistance. If it be possible for us in any way to help you to give effect to your own desires, I need not say that we are entirely at your service; but, in the meanwhile, I can assure you, on behalf, I am sure, of the people of this country that we most heartily wish success to your efforts, believing, as I have said, that it will in your case, as it has already done in the case of Canada, conduce to your prosperity and to your power. But as regards the larger question, and anything in the nature of a federation of the Empire, the subject seems to me to depend entirely upon the feeling which exists in the Colonies themselves. Here you will be met half way. The question is whether up to the present time there is such a genuine popular demand for closer union as would justify us in considering practical proposals to give it shape.

I feel that there is a real necessity for some better machinery of consultation between the self-governing Colonies and the mother country, and it has sometimes struck me—I offer it now merely as a personal suggestion—that it might be feasible to create a great council of the Empire to which the Colonies would send representative plenipotentiaries,—not mere delegates who were unable to speak in their name, without further reference to their respective Governments, but persons who by their position in the Colonies, by their representative character, and by their close touch with Colonial feeling, would

POLITICAL
RELATIONS.

be able, upon all subjects submitted to them, to give really effective and valuable advice. If such a council were to be created it would at once assume an immense importance, and it is perfectly evident that it might develop into something still greater. It might slowly grow to that Federal Council to which we must always look forward as our ultimate ideal.

And to a council of this kind would be committed, in the first instance, the discussion of all minor subjects of common interest, and their opinion would be taken and would weigh most materially in the balance before any decision were come to either by this country or by the legislatures of the several Colonies in regard to such matters.

There is only one point in reference to this which it is absolutely necessary that we all should bear in mind. It may be that the time has come, and if not I believe it will come, when the Colonies will desire to substitute for the slight relationship which at present exists a true partnership, and in that case they will want their share in the management of the Empire which we like to think is as much theirs as it is ours. But, of course, with the privilege of management and of control will also come the obligation and the responsibility. There will come some form of contribution towards the expense for objects which we shall have in common. That, I say, is self-evident, but it is to be borne in mind, even in these early stages of the consideration of the subject.

Now, gentlemen, in connection with this subject we have already made a small advance, upon which I congratulate myself, since it was accomplished during my term of office, though it was prepared by my predecessors; and it may have in the future important results. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the great Judicial Court of Appeal of the Empire. It is the nearest approach, the closest analogy, to the Supreme Court of the United States. It is a body of almost universal and world wide reputation and authority, and it is our desire naturally, in pursuit of the ideas which I am venturing to put before you, to increase its authority, if that be possible, and to give it a more representative character, and with that view we have most gladly secured the appointment as Privy Councillors of distinguished Judges from the courts of Canada, of Australia, and of South Africa, and they now will take their seats on equal terms with the other members of the Judicial Committee. Well, gentlemen, that is a good beginning, but I do not think that you can feel that at present the arrangement is on a permanent footing. There are objections to the present system which will present themselves to every mind. The Judges who have been chosen have hitherto been Judges who are still in active practice. That at the outset raises a considerable difficulty. It will be difficult for these Judges, even if it were consistent with our general idea of what is right, to take part in appeals in regard to cases upon which they have already decided. And another difficulty is that by the necessity of their position the greater part of their time will be spent in the colonies from which they come. They will only be here for indefinite periods, and, as it were on casual occasions. It is impossible to arrange the business of the Privy Council or to delay the suitors to meet their convenience, and the result of that is that though they would sit as Judges of the Privy Council, it may very often happen that they would not be present or be able to serve precisely on the occasions on which they might be most useful. Now all that could be altered by the Colonies themselves, and this is one of the subjects which I recommend to your attention. If these gentlemen were appointed solely and entirely for the purpose of representing the groups of Colonies on the Privy Council, they could reside permanently in this country, and not being themselves actively engaged in judicial work at home, they could sit and assist the Privy Council in all cases in which

their respective Colonies were engaged; and I think this would go very far to strengthen the position of the Privy Council, and at the same time to give to all the Colonies a security that justice would be done when they appeal to this great institution. May I note in passing a matter of some importance in regard to the proposed Australian Federation Bill; it appears in that Bill to be suggested that if it is passed appeals should only go to the Privy Council upon constitutional questions. I venture most respectfully to urge the reconsideration of that suggestion. Nothing is more desirable in the interests of the Colonies, in the interests of the United Kingdom and of the British Empire, than an uniformity of law, and that uniformity can only be obtained by occasional appeals to the highest tribunal, settling once for all the law for all parts of the Empire; and I confess I think it would be a great loss to the Colonists if they surrendered the opportunity of getting this judicial decision upon difficult and complicated points of law which from time to time may arise in the local courts.

DEFENCE.

I have said that the question to which I first directed your attention—that of closer relations—is greater than all the rest. I may say that it covers all the rest, because, of course, if Federation were established, or anything approaching to it, all these other questions to which I am now about to call your attention would be settled by whatever was the representative body of the Federation, and among them, and in the very first rank, must of necessity come the question of Imperial defence. Gentlemen, you have seen something of the military strength of the Empire; you will see on Saturday an astounding representation of its naval strength, by which alone a Colonial Empire can be bound together. You are aware that that representation—great, magnificent, unparalleled as it will be—is nevertheless only a part of the naval forces of the Empire spread in every part of the globe. The great Mediterranean fleet is still at its full force; the fleets on the various stations are all up to their normal strength, and the fleet which you will see on Saturday next is merely the Reserve and the Home fleet, ready to go anywhere, at any time, in the interests of the Colonies and of the United Kingdom.

DEFENCE. ---

This gigantic navy, and the military forces of the United Kingdom, are maintained, as you know, at heavy cost. I think the charge upon the Exchequer is at the present time something like 35 millions sterling per annum, and it constitutes more than one-third of the total income of the country. Now, these fleets, and this military armament, are not maintained exclusively, or even mainly, for the benefit of the United Kingdom, or for the defence of home interests. They are still more maintained as a necessity of empire, for the maintenance and protection of Imperial trade and of Imperial interests all over the world, and if you will for a moment consider the history of this country during, say, the present century, or, I would say, during the present reign, you will find that every war, great or small, in which we have been engaged, has had at the bottom a colonial interest, the interest, that is to say, either of a colony, or of a great dependency like India. That is absolutely true, and is likely to be true to the end of the chapter. If we had no Empire, there is no doubt whatever that our military and our naval resources would not require to be maintained at anything like their present level.

Now I venture to say that that must necessarily be the case in the future. Look at the condition of the Colonies. Assume,—although I am almost ashamed to assume it, even for the purpose of argument,—assume that these Colonies were separated from the mother country. What would be the position of the great Dominion of Canada? The

Dominion of Canada is bordered for 3,000 miles by a most powerful neighbour, whose potentialities are infinitely greater than her actual resources. She comes into conflict in regard to the most important interests with the rising power of Japan, and even in regard to some of her interests with the great empire of Russia. Now, let it not be supposed for a moment that I suggest as probable—I hardly like to think that it is even possible—that there should be a war between Canada, or on behalf of Canada, either with the United States of America, or with any of the other Powers with which she may come into contact, but what I do say is this, that if Canada had not behind her to-day, and does not continue to have behind her this great military and naval power of Great Britain, she would have to make concessions to her neighbours, and to accept views which might be extremely distasteful to her in order to remain permanently on good terms with them. She would not be able to, it would be impossible that she should, herself control all the details of her own destiny; she would be, to a greater or less extent, in spite of the bravery of her population and the patriotism of her people, she would still be, to a great extent, a dependent country.

Look at Australia again. I need not dwell on the point at any length, but we find the same thing. The interests of Australia have already, on more than one occasion, threatened to come into conflict with those of two of the greatest military nations of the Continent, and military nations, let me add, who also possess each of them a very large, one of them an enormous, fleet. There may be also questions of difficulty arising with Eastern nations, with Japan or even with China, and under those circumstances the Australasian Colonies are in precisely the same position as the Dominion of Canada. In South Africa, in addition to the ambitions of foreign countries, to which I need not further allude, our Colonies there have domestic rivals who are heavily armed, prepared both for offence and for defence; and again I say, nothing could be more suicidal or more fatal than for any of those great groups of Colonies either to separate themselves in the present stage from the protecting forces of the mother country, or to neglect themselves to take their fair share in those protective resources.

What, then, I want to urge upon you is, and in doing so, I think I am speaking to those who are already converted, that we have a common interest in this matter, and certainly it has been a great pleasure to us, a great pride to us, that Australia, in the first instance, offered voluntarily a contribution in aid of the British Navy besides taking her full share of her own military defences. Now we have to recognise that the Cape Colony has followed in that patriotic course. I do not know upon what conditions these gifts may be offered or continued, but, at all events, the spirit in which they have been made is most heartily reciprocated in this country. The amount, of course, is at the present time absolutely trifling, but that is not the point. We are looking to the Colonies as still children, but rapidly approaching manhood. In the lifetime, perhaps, of some of us, we shall see the population doubled, and certainly in the lifetime of our descendants there will be great nations where now there are comparatively sparse populations; and to establish in the early days this principle of mutual support and of a truly Imperial patriotism, is a great thing of which our Colonial statesmen may well be proud.

I shall be very glad to hear the views of the Premiers in regard to this question of any contribution which they think the Colonies would be willing to make in order to establish this principle in regard to the naval defence of the Empire. As regards the military defence of the Empire, I am bound to say that we are still behindhand, although a great deal has been done in recent years. As you know, the Colonial Defence Committee of experts has been sitting, and has

accomplished already, with the assistance of the Colonies, a very great improvement in the state of things which existed before ; but I cannot say from the information at my disposal that with all the magnificent resources of the Colonies their organisation at present is satisfactory. This is more a matter of detail, and I do not propose to dwell upon it now, but I would remind the Premiers assembled that if war breaks out war will be sudden, and there will be no time for preparation then. Therefore it is of the first importance that we, all having a common interest, should have beforehand a scheme of common defence against any possible or at all events any probable enemy, and we ought to have these schemes of defence before us. In the case of some of the Colonies schemes have already been prepared ; in others no scheme has been prepared or concerted up to the present time, and I believe it is most desirable that that omission should be repaired. It is also most desirable, in Australia especially, and to a lesser extent, although still to an important extent in South Africa, that there should be an uniformity in regard to the military preparations. An uniformity of arms is, I need scarcely say, of immense importance, as it gives us interchangeability of weapon, and there are also uniformity of equipment, some central provision for stores, and for the military instruction of the local forces, all of which can be arranged with the assistance of the Colonies, and, I believe, very much to their advantage.

EXCHANGE OF MILITARY FORCES.

But I am looking forward to something more than that. The interchangeability in the several groups is a matter of great importance, but how much greater it would be if there were interchangeability between the whole forces of the Empire, between the forces which you have in the several Colonies and the forces of which you have seen some examples at home since you came to these shores. That is a matter which also can be arranged, and to which we shall bring at all events the utmost good will. If you have, as Canada has at Kingston, an important military college, it may be possible for us to offer occasionally to the cadets of that college commissions in the British Army. But a still more important matter which has suggested itself to my mind, and which now I desire to commend to your earnest attention, is a proposal which may be described as the interchangeability of military duties. To put it in plain English it means this : that, for instance, a Canadian regiment should come to this country, take up its quarters for a period of time, at least 12 months, with the British army, and form, during the whole time that it is in this country, a part of the British army, and that in return a similar regiment of British troops, or a brigade of artillery or cavalry, should go to Canada and should reside and exercise with the Canadian army, and form a part of that army. The idea is that this should be chiefly for the purpose of drill and instruction, and I cannot doubt that it will be of enormous advantage to the Canadian troops, and to the troops of the Colonies, to measure themselves against the regular army, and to learn the discipline and the manœuvres which are practised on a large scale in this country.

But my imagination goes even further. It seems to me possible that although in the first instance the idea is that such a regiment coming to this country would come solely for that purpose and would not be engaged in military operations, yet if it were their wish to share in the dangers and the glories of the British army and take their part in expeditions in which the British army may be engaged, I see no reason why these colonial troops should not, from time to time, fight side by side with their British colleagues. That, however, is a matter which, like everything else which I am putting before you, is not a recommendation which has any pressure behind it ; it is

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merely a suggestion to be taken up by you voluntarily if it commends itself to your minds. What I have suggested might take place with regard to Canada, I believe might equally take place with regard to such fine forces as those of which we have seen representatives from some of the Colonies of Australia, and might take place also with regard to the South African Colonies.

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS.

I pass on, then, to another question, and that is as to the future commercial relations between this country and her Colonies. How far is it possible to make those relations closer and more intimate? I have said that I believe in sentiment as the greatest of all the forces in the general government of the world, but at the same time, I should like to bring to the reinforcement of sentiment the motives which are derived from material and personal interest. But undoubtedly the fiscal arrangements of the different Colonies differ so much among themselves, and all differ so much from those of the mother country, that it would be a matter of the greatest complication and difficulty to arrive at any conclusion which would unite us commercially in the same sense in which the Zollverein united the empire of Germany. It may be borne in mind that the history of that Zollverein is most interesting and most instructive. It commenced entirely as a commercial convention, dealing in the first instance only partially with the trade of the empire, it was rapidly extended to include the whole trade of the empire, and it finally made possible and encouraged the ultimate union of the empire. But this is a matter upon which at the present time, rather than suggest any proposals of my own, I desire to hear the views of the gentlemen present.

In the meanwhile, however, I may say that I note a resolution which appears to have been passed unanimously at the meeting of the Premiers in Hobart, in which the desire was expressed for closer commercial arrangements with the Empire, and I think it was suggested that a Commission of Inquiry should be created in order to see in what way practical effect might be given to the aspiration. If that be the case, and if it were thought that at the present time you were not prepared to go beyond inquiry, if it were the wish of the other Colonies, of Canada and of the South African Colonies, to join in such an inquiry, Her Majesty's Government would be delighted to make arrangements for the purpose, and to accept any suggestions as to the form of the reference and the character and constitution of the Commission, and would very gladly take part in it.

But that brings me to another question connected with commercial relations, and of great importance. I refer to the treaties at present existing between the mother country, acting on behalf of the Colonies as well as of herself, and foreign countries. The question has been raised at various times in the shape of resolutions or suggestions from the Colonies that certain treaties, notably a treaty with Germany and a treaty with Belgium, should be denounced. It should be borne in mind that that is for us a most important question. Our trade with Germany and Belgium is larger than our trade with all the Colonies combined. It is possible that if we denounced those treaties Germany and Belgium would endeavour, I do not say whether they would succeed, but they might endeavour to retaliate, and for some time, at any rate, our commercial relations with these two countries might be disturbed. Therefore a step of that kind is one which can only be taken after the fullest consideration, and in deference to very strong opinion both in this country and in the Colonies. Now the question is brought to a practical issue, or may be brought to a practical issue, by the recent action of Canada. As all are aware, Canada has offered preferential

terms to the mother country, and Germany and Belgium have immediately protested and claimed similar terms under these treaties. Her Majesty's Government desire to know from the Colonies whether, so far as they are concerned, if it be found that the arrangements proposed by Canada are inconsistent with the conditions of those treaties, they desire that those treaties shall be denounced. If that be the unanimous wish of the Colonies, after considering the effect of that denunciation upon them as well as upon us, because they also are concerned in the arrangements which are made by these treaties, then all I can say at the present time is that Her Majesty's Government will most earnestly consider such a recommendation from the Colonies, and will give to it the favourable regard which such a memorial deserves.

But I should add that there is another question which is still more difficult, but about which I only wish to offer a word of warning to the representatives present. Besides those two treaties which are very special in their terms, and which prevent the preferential arrangement, or which appear to prevent the preferential arrangement contemplated by Canada, we have a most favoured nation clause in all our treaties to which most of the Colonies are parties. I may explain that, under the terms of the Canadian resolution, if any foreign nation were to offer to Canada beneficial terms as defined in the resolution, Canada would then be bound to give to that country the same preference as is offered to Great Britain. Let me suppose, for instance, that it was a minor country like Holland, and assume for the sake of argument that Holland offered these advantages, thereupon Canada would be compelled to give the same terms to Holland that she now offers to the mother country. She would then be bound by most favoured nation treaties to give the same terms to practically every important commercial country in the world. It would be, I think, a matter of impossibility to denounce those treaties, because that involves the whole trade of the empire, and in some cases there is no term of denunciation in the treaties.

But of course the whole difficulty can be avoided—I only point it out in passing—the whole difficulty can be avoided by any colony which desires to make the preferential arrangement with the mother country, if that colony will confine its offer *nominatim* to the mother country and not make it to a foreign country, but if it is offered to a foreign country then, as I say, it will be controlled by the most favoured nation treaties throughout the world.

PACIFIC CABLE.

The next point to which I will allude very briefly in connection with our commercial relations is the question of improved communications. That was the subject of very important resolutions at the time of the conference at Ottawa, and already I am happy to think that considerable effect has been given to those resolutions in regard to the fast mail service, which was the first, and, probably, the most important of those resolutions. Arrangements are now in progress by which it will be accomplished, and I hope that in connection with that the service between Canada and Australia will also be improved, and there will be nothing further to be desired.

PACIFIC CABLE.

There is, however, still pending the question of a Pacific cable passing entirely through British territory. Upon that we desire to have the opinions of the gentlemen present as to how far they are prepared to go. I would say in regard to this, and also in regard to the fast steam service, in dealing with the matter at all, we are giving the most striking proof we can of our good will, and of our desire to meet your wishes. Neither of these proposals would have been made by us. I must frankly say that we are not dissatisfied with the

PACIFIC CABLE.

present arrangements ; we do not feel, although we think that they are valuable proposals, yet we do not feel that they are urgent, and therefore we should not ourselves, or by ourselves, have been disposed to offer subsidies either to the steamboat service, or to the Pacific Cable, and we are only induced to do it by our desire to show that in any matter in which our Colonies are themselves deeply interested, they may count upon the support and assistance of the mother country. Well, in regard to the Pacific Cable, the matter stands thus. A representative committee was appointed, which has discussed the whole subject ; it has come to the conclusion that such a cable is practicable, has roughly estimated the cost (which is probably less than was originally anticipated), and has also estimated the probable returns. What remains, however, to be inquired into is as to the subsidies which the several Colonies are prepared to give towards this undertaking. Without in this venturing to pledge my colleagues, I say that to any proposal which may be made by the Colonies, the Government will give their most favourable consideration.

IMPERIAL PENNY POSTAGE.

IMPERIAL
PENNY
POSTAGE.

I also should mention the desire which is widely felt and which I share for an improved postal communication with the Colonies. I believe that that matter rests entirely with the Colonies themselves, and that they have revenue difficulties in the matter which have hitherto prevented us coming to any conclusion. But I confess that I think that one of the very first things to bind together the sister nations is to have the readiest and the easiest possible communication between their several units, and as far as this country is concerned, I believe we should be quite ready to make any sacrifice of revenue that may be required in order to secure an universal penny post throughout the Empire.

COMMERCIAL CODE.

COMMERCIAL.
CODE.

A very desirable but minor point would be, if it were possible, and I do not think that there is any serious practical difficulty, an agreement as to a commercial code for the Empire. We all know that trade relations are guided very much by the simplicity with which they can be conducted, and if we had throughout the British Empire the same law in regard to all commercial matters, I have no doubt whatever that that in itself would be a strong inducement that the course of trade should take the direction that we desire. This, however, is a matter of detail ; I should only desire an expression of opinion as to the desirability of it, but if it were thought really a desirable thing to accomplish, it might be secured by an expert Commission, which would settle the details, and I think I have already circulated to the Premiers a memorandum on the subject which has been prepared by the Parliamentary draughtsmen of this country, and which would be the basis for discussion by any Commission which might be appointed.

LOAD LINES.

LOAD LINES.

A difficulty has arisen, which is local I think to Australia, with regard to the settlement of load lines. The settlement of load lines has been undertaken in this country with a view to securing the safety of ships at sea, and of the men who go down to the sea in them, and a load line has been established for the United Kingdom. It would be absolutely impossible for the United Kingdom, as long as that is in force, to recognise any other load line less safe than their own, because otherwise it would lead to a transfer of trade. It would be perfectly natural, if a shipowner wished to escape the obligations

of the law to transfer himself to a Colonial registry, and to come into competition with our shipowners with arrangements which, although more profitable, are certainly less safe. But some difficulty has arisen in regard to this in some of the Australian Colonies, and I should be very glad to see that removed. I hope that a proposal which I have to make to you will entirely remove any further difficulty, and it is that the British Board of Trade should add to the expert authority which has from time to time to decide the load line representatives of the Colonies concerned. In that way the voice of the Colonies and the interests of the Colonies in any local question would be fully heard before a joint line was agreed upon.

LOAD LINES.

PARIS EXHIBITION OF 1900.

I have also a small matter to ask your instructions upon in regard to the Paris Exhibition for the year 1900. We were very anxious, if possible, to secure an united representation of the Empire in one building. That has proved to be impossible owing to the French arrangements, and the way in which they have divided the exhibition; but what we hope we have secured is this: that a special colonial building for the whole of the colonial exhibition, in a first-rate situation, and exactly opposite the French colonial exhibition, shall be reserved, and all the Colonies will then exhibit together in a single building. In the other one would be the French colonial exhibits, but the exhibits of the mother country of France and of the mother country of the United Kingdom will be, in each case, in a separate building. In regard to this matter it has been proposed to put representatives of all the Colonies upon the Royal Commission. It will be a position of honour and of importance. But we are in this difficulty, that the Agents-General, who would naturally suggest themselves are, I believe, rather a varying body, that some of them are likely no longer to be holding office in 1900, and that therefore it will be necessary to make a special appointment *ad hoc* for this purpose, and what we wish to know is whether that would be agreeable to the Colonies, and if so, if they would each of them nominate some one as their representative upon the Commission, that some one being either the Agent General or any one else whom they thought better to nominate for the purpose.

PARIS
EXHIBITION
OF 1900.

ALIEN IMMIGRATION.

One other question I have to mention, and only one; that is, I wish to direct your attention to certain legislation which is in process of consideration, or which has been passed by some of the Colonies, in regard to the immigration of aliens, and particularly of Asiatics.

ALIEN
IMMIGRATION.

I have seen these Bills, and they differ in some respects one from the other, but there is no one of them, except perhaps the Bill which comes to us from Natal, to which we can look with satisfaction. I wish to say that Her Majesty's Government thoroughly appreciate the object and the needs of the Colonies in dealing with this matter. We quite sympathise with the determination of the white inhabitants of these Colonies which are in comparatively close proximity to millions and hundreds of millions of Asiatics that there shall not be an influx of people alien in civilization, alien in religion, alien in customs, whose influx, moreover, would most seriously interfere with the legitimate rights of the existing labour population. An immigration of that kind must, I quite understand, in the interest of the Colonies, be prevented at all hazards, and we shall not offer any opposition to the proposals intended with that object, but we ask you also to bear in mind the traditions of the Empire, which makes no distinction in favour of, or against race or colour; and to exclude, by reason of their colour, or by reason

ALIEN IMMIGRATION.

of their race, all Her Majesty's Indian subjects, or even all Asiatics, would be an act so offensive to those peoples that it would be most painful, I am quite certain, to Her Majesty to have to sanction it. Consider what has been brought to your notice during your visit to this country. The United Kingdom owns as its brightest and greatest dependency that enormous Empire of India, with 300,000,000 of subjects, who are as loyal to the Crown as you are yourselves, and among them there are hundreds and thousands of men who are every whit as civilized as we are ourselves, who are, if that is anything, better born in the sense that they have older traditions and older families, who are men of wealth, men of cultivation, men of distinguished valour, men who have brought whole armies and placed them at the service of the Queen, and have in times of great difficulty and trouble, such for instance as on the occasion of the Indian Mutiny, saved the empire by their loyalty. I say, you, who have seen all this, cannot be willing to put upon those men a slight which I think is absolutely unnecessary for your purpose, and which would be calculated to provoke ill-feeling, discontent, irritation, and would be most unpalatable to the feelings not only of Her Majesty the Queen, but of all her people.

What I venture to think you have to deal with is the character of the immigration. It is not because a man is of a different colour from ourselves that he is necessarily an undesirable immigrant, but it is because he is dirty, or he is immoral, or he is a pauper, or he has some other objection which can be defined in an Act of Parliament, and by which the exclusion can be managed with regard to all those whom you really desire to exclude. Well, gentlemen, this is a matter I am sure for friendly consultation between us. As I have said, the Colony of Natal has arrived at an arrangement which is absolutely satisfactory to them, I believe, and remember they have, if possible, an even greater interest than you, because they are closer to the immigration which has already begun there on a very large scale, and they have adopted legislation which they believe will give them all that they want, and to which the objection I have taken does not apply, which does not come in conflict with this sentiment which I am sure you share with us; and I hope, therefore, that during your visit it may be possible for us to arrange a form of words which will avoid hurting the feelings of any of Her Majesty's subjects, while at the same time it would amply protect the Australian Colonies against any invasion of the class to which they would justly object. Now, gentlemen, I really owe you a humble apology for having detained you so long, but I thought that it might be to your convenience that this recapitulation should be made of some things which might be treated in our discussions, and I have only now to thank you very much for your kindness in listening to me so patiently, and to express a hope that you will be good enough to give me generally and at this stage in our proceedings your ideas as to the course which we should take in regard to our future meetings."

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS.

The commercial relations of the United Kingdom and the self-governing Colonies were first considered, and the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:—

1. That the Premiers of the self-governing Colonies unanimously and earnestly recommend the denunciation, at the earliest convenient time, of any treaties which now hamper the commercial relations between Great Britain and her Colonies.
2. That in the hope of improving the trade relations between the mother country and the Colonies, the Premiers present undertake to confer with their colleagues with the view to seeing whether such a result can be properly secured by a preference given by the Colonies to the products of the United Kingdom.

Her Majesty's Government have already given effect to the first of these resolutions by formally notifying to the Governments concerned their wish to terminate the commercial treaties with Germany and Belgium, which alone of the existing commercial treaties of the United Kingdom are a bar to the establishment of preferential tariff relations between the mother country and the Colonies. From and after the 30th July 1898, therefore, there will be nothing in any of Her Majesty's treaty obligations to preclude any action which any of the Colonies may see fit to take in pursuance of the second resolution.

It is, however, right to point out that if any Colony were to go farther and to grant preferential terms to any Foreign Country, the provisions of the most favoured nation clauses in many treaties between Her Majesty and other powers, in which the Colonies are included, would necessitate the concession of similar terms to those countries.

On the question of the political relations between the mother country and the self-governing Colonies, the resolutions adopted were as follows:—

POLITICAL
RELATIONS.

1. The Prime Ministers here assembled are of opinion that the present political relations between the United Kingdom and the self-governing Colonies are generally satisfactory under the existing condition of things.

Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented.

2. They are also of opinion that it is desirable, whenever and wherever practicable, to group together under a federal union those colonies which are geographically united.

Carried unanimously.

3. Meanwhile, the Premiers are of opinion that it would be desirable to hold periodical conferences of representatives of the Colonies and Great Britain for the discussion of matters of common interest.

Carried unanimously.

Mr. Seddon and Sir E. N. C. Braddon dissented from the first resolution because they were of opinion that the time had already come when an effort should be made to render more formal the political ties between the United Kingdom and the Colonies. The majority of the Premiers were not yet prepared to adopt this position, but there was a strong feeling amongst some of them that with the rapid growth of population in the Colonies, the present relations could not continue indefinitely, and that some means would have to be devised for giving the Colonies a voice in the control and direction of those questions of Imperial interest in which they are concerned equally with the mother country.

It was recognised at the same time that such a share in the direction of Imperial policy would involve a proportionate contribution in aid of Imperial expenditure, for which at present, at any rate, the Colonies generally are not prepared.

On the question of Imperial defence, the various points raised in the speech of the Secretary of State were fully discussed. On the most important of them, that of Naval Defence, some misapprehension had arisen as to the views of Her Majesty's Government in regard to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, accompanied by the Senior Naval Lord, attended the conference on its fifth and last meeting, and made the following statement of the attitude of Her Majesty's Government.

IMPERIAL
DEFENCE.

"I have been asked to make some statement with reference to the attitude of the Admiralty as to Colonial contributions towards Naval Defence, and in particular as to the agreement with the Australasian Colonies.

Naval
Contributions.

I may say generally that we are content to abide by the existing agreement. The declarations which have been made on one of the earlier days of the Conference by some of the Colonial Premiers have convinced me as to the difficulties which would beset other methods of Colonial contribution, and so, I repeat, we are content to abide by the existing agreement. We would be perfectly prepared to hear any argument against it, or for modifying it; but as matters now stand, and in view of what I have learnt of what has passed in this room, we should certainly not propose to give notice for the termination of that agreement, and we should leave it as it is, and administer it as it has been administered hitherto.

The question may be looked at from three points of view—from the political point of view, from the strategical point of view, and from the purely Admiralty and Naval point of view. From the purely Admiralty and Naval point of view we can work the agreement, and we should wish to work it on the same lines as those on which we work it at present. From the political point of view, I can of course only speak as an individual member of the Government; but as First Lord of the Admiralty and a Member of the Government, I value the principle which is involved in the contribution of the Colonies to the Navy which was settled some years ago; and I think it would be a great pity and a retrograde step if such ties as have been established were to be cut. Sir Gordon Sprigg has sent us a very gracious proposal from the Cape, which shows the development of that system. We should be very glad to open up negotiations with Canada, if not precisely on the same lines, because its situation is somewhat different, yet on other lines.

I come back to the point that we value generally the contributions to the Navy, not only for their amount, because, I frankly admit that, with our present vast estimates, a contribution of £126,000 is not an item to which we should attach, at the Admiralty, any great importance. Of course I cannot speak for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Well, that being so, from the political point of view, I myself am in favour of the maintenance of the agreement. I have said that from the Naval point of view I am also in favour of the maintenance of the agreement. Though I do not mean to say that it assists us to any great extent, it does produce between the Admiralty and the Colonies certain ties which we value, and which I should be very sorry to do anything to loosen.

From the strategical point of view, we should be glad that the Admiralty should have a free hand. I was glad to see that it has been acknowledged by the Premiers that the operations of the Australian squadron in the Solomon Islands, and generally in the Pacific groups, have a distinct Colonial as well as an Imperial interest, and that no complaint could be raised against the employment of ships on the Australasian station for purposes so distinctly Colonial as many of these purposes are, though such employment might carry the ships to a considerable distance from the Continent of Australia. But, apart from this, the object for which we want a free hand is to be able to conduct the defence of Australia on the same principles as those which we should follow in the defence of our English, Scotch and Irish ports, principles which exclude our undertaking to detach ships to particular ports. For instance, we could not undertake to post one ship at Sydney, another at Adelaide, and another at Melbourne. We must rely upon the localities themselves for the defence of these ports, while, on our part, we undertake that no organised expedition should be directed against any part of Australia. No organised expedition could be sent either from Japan, or from the United States, or from France without the full knowledge of the Admiralty. That I assume. We are too ubiquitous for any such expedition to be secretly organised. If it were organised, our whole strength would be directed to defeating such a movement. I see it has been suggested in a previous discussion that possibly we might, under

stress, take away the ships which may be on the Australian Station, and for which you have partly paid and on which you rely, in order to send them to some distant quarter. But I cannot conceive any case, unless we lost actually our sea power, when we should think it our duty not to defend so valuable a portion of our Empire as Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania, for the safety of which we hold ourselves responsible in the same way as we hold ourselves responsible for the safety of the British Islands. I put this very strongly so that there may be no apprehension. In all our strategical combinations we have never conceived the possibility that we should expose such possessions as the Australian Colonies.

Let me say another word on the suggestion of which mention has been made that it was the desire of the Admiralty to have full control of the Australian Squadron in time of war, even so far as to send the ships paid for by the Australian Colonies thousands of miles away to attack the commerce of an enemy. This rumour has, probably, originated from our claiming freedom in the sense in which I have claimed it.

If it has been said that we want to have the full and free disposal of our ships, this certainly, as far as my own policy and that of the present Board is concerned, does not mean that we claim to withdraw the ships built under our agreement with the Australian Colonies and to send them to the Cape or to China, but that we desire freedom so to manage the ships as best to protect that zone and that sphere to which they belong, if we heard that an enemy were planning an expedition towards the coasts of Australia. In such a case we might possibly gather the whole of our ships together, and taking such other precautions as might be necessary, use them regardless—regardless is, perhaps, too strong a word—but use them as we should see best for the protection of the general interests of that part of the Queen's dominions.

I know that an erroneous impression has existed that, not only in the Colonies, but at home, we should station ships to defend particular ports. Take Liverpool for instance. We, the Navy, are under no guarantee to defend Liverpool. The defences of Liverpool are in the hands of the Army who practically manage the torpedoes and the mines, the shore defences in fact. It is the army ashore which is responsible, with such co-operation as might be necessary, if a comparatively large expedition were to threaten the place. This is the freedom which we claim.

The misunderstanding has arisen, I have been told, from the interpretation of a speech of the Duke of Devonshire. I know that speech well. It did not for one moment, to my mind, justify the fear that we should, in breach of our agreement with Australia, claim to withdraw the ships from thence which had been paid for by Colonial contributions. The principal point in that speech was a protest against the idea of what I call hugging the shore, against the idea that protection by the Navy superseded the necessity for shore defences. It laid down the principle that our policy must be aggressive, seeking out the enemy, a policy which, as regards Australia, might aim at attacking the possessions of other powers at war with us in the Australian zone, or at seeking out their ships within the Australian station wherever they might be. Hence our claim for freedom for the Navy. Hence the duty of the Colonies as well as the mother country to look after their shore defences. I do not say that we should not prefer contributions without any tie whatever, but I do not make such a demand, and so far as the policy of the present Board of Admiralty is concerned, I am prepared to stand by the existing agreement."

After hearing Mr. Goschen, the Conference passed the following resolution :—

That the statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty with reference to the Australian squadron is most satisfactory, and the Premiers of Australasia favour the continuance of the Australian squadron under the terms of the existing agreement.

This resolution was supported by all the Australasian Premiers, except Mr. Kingston, who declined to vote pending further consideration of a scheme, which he put before the Conference, for the establishment of a branch of the Royal Naval Reserve in Australia.

The Prime Minister of the Cape also announced to the Conference that, in pursuance of the resolution passed by the Legislature of that Colony, in favour of a contribution towards the Navy, he was prepared to offer on behalf of the Colony an unconditional contribution of the cost of a first class battleship. This spontaneous offer was received with grateful appreciation by Her Majesty's Government and the members of the Conference.

*Military
Defence.*

In discussing the other questions of Imperial Defence, the Conference had the advantage of the presence of Capt. Nathan, Secretary of the Colonial Defence Committee, who was able to furnish explanations to the members on various points, and to point out the steps which, in the opinion of the Committee, were most needed in each colony to complete its preparedness for any emergency. The Premiers all agreed to give the views expressed their careful consideration when, on their return to their respective Colonies, they were in a position to consult their colleagues and Parliaments.

The suggestion made for an occasional interchange of military units between the mother country and the Colonies was generally recognised as one likely to prove useful in increasing the efficiency of the Colonial forces, and the Premiers of those Colonies which possess permanent forces of a purely military character expressed their intention of examining on their return what legislative or other measures might be necessary in order to give effect to it as opportunity offered.

On behalf of the War Office the Conference was informed that, with a view to securing uniformity in the arms and ammunition used by the military forces throughout the Empire, the Secretary of State for War was prepared to make an offer for the exchange (or conversion) of the Martini Henry rifles at present in use for rifles of the smaller calibre now exclusively adopted by the Navy and Army.

*TREATIES WITH
JAPAN AND
TUNIS.*

The question of the Treaty with Japan was brought before the Conference, but, with the exception of Queensland, Newfoundland, and Natal, the Premiers declared that they were not prepared to abandon their former attitude with regard to the Treaty, to which they did not desire to adhere.

They also, with the exception of the Premier of Newfoundland, stated that they did not wish the Colonies they represented to become parties to the Convention in regard to Trade with Tunis now being negotiated with France.

*COLOURED
IMMIGRATIONS.*

On the question of the legislative measures which have been passed by various Colonies for the exclusion of coloured immigrants a full exchange of views took place, and though no definite agreement was reached at the meeting, as the Premiers desired to consult their colleagues and Parliaments on the subject, Her Majesty's Government have every expectation that the natural desire of the Colonies to protect themselves against an overwhelming influx of Asiatics can be attained without placing a stigma upon any of Her Majesty's subjects on the sole ground of race or colour.

*POSTAL COM-
MUNICATIONS.*

With regard to postal communications within the Empire, it appeared that in the present financial circumstances of the Colonies an Imperial penny post was impracticable, although the Prime Ministers of the Cape Colony and Natal declared themselves in favour of such a step, and expressed their belief that the legislatures of their Colonies would be prepared to give effect to it.

PACIFIC CABLE.

The question of the proposed Pacific Cable was brought up, but the majority of the Premiers desired that the subject should be deferred until they had had

time to consider the report of the Committee appointed to consider the question last year. It was, however, pointed out to the members of the Conference that the matter was not one in which the United Kingdom was taking the initiative, although Her Majesty's Government were ready to consider any proposal for working with and assisting the Colonies if they attached great importance to the project; and that they would now await definite proposals from the Colonies interested before proceeding further in the matter.

At the last meeting of the Conference a resolution was passed unanimously by those of the Premiers who were still present, to the following effect :—

INVESTMENT OF
TRUST FUNDS.
—

Those assembled are of the opinion that the time has arrived when all restriction which prevents investments of trust funds in Colonial stock should be removed.

This resolution will be communicated to and commended to the consideration of the proper authorities.

Amongst minor questions discussed, was that of the representation of the Colonies at the Paris Exhibition of 1900. Her Majesty's Government had originally desired that the Empire as a whole should exhibit in one building, but this was found to be impracticable, the French Government not being able to put the requisite amount of space at the disposal of Her Majesty's Government.

PARIS
EXHIBITION.
—

Under the changed conditions, only the Premiers of Canada, New South Wales, Queensland, and Cape Colony, declared their intention of being represented; while the Premiers of the other Colonies reserved their decision, with the exception of the Premier of South Australia who stated that his Colony was not prepared to take part in the exhibition under any circumstances.

A discussion arose upon the alteration of the date of departure from Adelaide of the mail steamers under the new contracts with the Peninsular and Oriental and Orient Companies. There was considerable difference of opinion, but it was decided to accept Thursday as the most suitable date under all the circumstances.

DATE OF
DEPARTURE OF
AUSTRALIAN
MAILS.
—

The question of Load Lines was discussed privately with the Premiers of the Colonies in connexion with recent legislation on the subject as to which difficulties have arisen.

LOAD LINES.
—

The subject of the future Administration of British New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides was introduced, but no decision was arrived at upon it.

NEW HEBRIDES,
&C.
—

At the concluding meeting the Premiers unanimously passed the following resolution :—

The Premiers, before they separate, beg to put on record their appreciation of the many courtesies which they have received at the hands of Mr. Chamberlain personally, and of the kind treatment which has been extended to them by the Government and People of the United Kingdom.

July 31, 1897.
